

## CASE No. 6

REQUEST FOR REVISION OF THE 1961 CODE TO INCLUDE DIRECTIVES  
RELATIVE TO NOMINA DUBIA. (Z.N.(S.) 1551)

By Hobart M. Smith (*Department of Zoology and Museum of Natural  
History, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, U.S.A.*)

The omission of any directives relative to *nomina dubia* in the 1961 Code is a serious deficiency. The defence has been proposed that problems pertaining to *nomina dubia* are strictly zoological decisions. This is not wholly the case. Some decisions are strictly zoological, to be sure, but others are equally strictly nomenclatural, and for the latter taxonomists urgently need procedural rules.

It is generally envisaged, and here accepted, that names accompanied by descriptions which are in themselves inadequate for determination, and which on these ground might rightfully be called *nomina dubia*, are in practice not so considered if types are available and identifiable. In actual practice a name is considered a *nomen dubium* only if the types, as well as the description, prove to be inadequate for fixation of the name with known species. This can occur if the types are lost or for other reasons are unavailable for study, or if the types are actually in such poor condition that identification even with them in hand is impossible.

Strictly nomenclatural questions that can arise concerning *nomina dubia*, as thus defined, include the following :

(a) Is it permissible for subsequent students arbitrarily (knowingly or not) to fix a *nomen dubium* with a known species ?

(b) If so, what limitation on fixation is imposed ? That is, can it not be demanded that any fixation accepted conform with all known facts, and that any attempt at fixation shown to be inconsistent with all known facts loses its priority ?

(c) If *nomina dubia* can be fixed within the sanction of the rules, does the "first reviser's" fixation take precedence over anyone else's ?

(d) What authorship and date accompanies fixation ? Does the name retain the original date and authorship ?

(e) If the types of *nomina dubia* are at hand but are useless for name-fixation may a subsequent reviser substitute neotypes for them, retaining the original date and authorship ?

It is surely possible for the Commission to prescribe answers to these and no doubt other strictly nomenclatural problems posed by *nomina dubia*. A start was made many years ago in Opinion 136, and a noteworthy effort to continue the search for proper directives is evident in voluminous subsequent discussions, even including the *Copenhagen Decisions* (1953 : 24-25, 77) and the Bradley preliminary draft of the Code (1958, *Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 14 : 46-47). These should provide most of the data and views essential to an effective review of the problem of *nomina dubia* by the Commission.